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**The ‘good’ interculturalist yesterday, today and tomorrow:  
Everyday life-theory-research-policy-practice**

*The word ‘intercultural’ has been in use in research and practice in different parts of the world for many decades. In daily life, it is less used compared to ‘competitors’ such as multicultural or, increasingly, diversity. Interdisciplinary at heart, like all concepts, the word ‘intercultural’ is also very polysemic and politically driven. Our interest in the notion of the ‘intercultural’ in this conference rests on the root of the word, ‘inter’, which hints at reciprocity, being located/occurring/existing between.*

*Regardless of the way the ‘intercultural’ is understood and used – and sometimes misused and abused – most utterances containing the word might refer to positive values or objectives such as tolerance, respect, open-mindedness, etc. These elements are often paired with the problematic concepts of ‘culture’ and ‘identity’. In any case, the ‘intercultural’ should be ‘good’ and lead to ‘good things’. Although there appears to be an implicit agreement about what this ‘good’ entails, an increasing number of voices are critical of the way it is constructed, discussed and expressed. The adjective ‘good’ always includes implicit and/or explicit comparison, political positioning, (inter-)subjectivity as well as judgement.*

*This conference serves as a platform to discuss what it means to be a ‘good’ interculturalist today. We expect many and varied (discordant) voices to meet during the conference. The past and future can also be considered, in diachronic and/or synchronic perspectives. The following broad contexts, which often overlap, will be examined: everyday life, theory, research, policy and practice. The micro-contexts of (language) education, teacher education, internationalization of education, business, health care, intercultural couplehood, are of interest amongst others (Dervin, 2018).*

In response to this summons, delegates of annual conference of the International Association for Languages and Intercultural Communication (IALIC) assembled at the University of Helsinki, Finland, at end of August, 2018, for the 18<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Association (<https://blogs.helsinki.fi/ialic2018/programme/>). In this first issue of Volume 20, we present the very best papers which were submitted to address the conference call set out above. We thank Fred Dervin and his team for a vibrant and hospitable conference although, unusually, it has been left to Prue (as Association Chair) to act as Guest Editor for this issue, rather than the conference organiser, supported by Malcolm (as Executive Editor).

It will not surprise readers that a special issue which engages with the theme of the ‘good interculturalist’ should attract papers which engage with the development of

interculturality at different stages of language education around the world. Thus, the first three papers in this issue address the theme of education and learning at two different levels: secondary and higher education. However, interculturality is not just developed within the hallowed ground of schools, colleges and universities. It is also developed through the different forms of ethical practice which we carry out, moment by moment, in the unfolding of our daily lives. The final paper in this short issue critically explores one form of ethical practice, and the way in which it has been recontextualised from its original location in Asia, to Europe and North America.

### *Education, learning and the good interculturalist*

If one does not necessarily have to learn to become a ‘good’ interculturalist within school, college and university, just about everyone who attended the conference in Helsinki would probably have agreed that some degree of formal education at least enables one to become a ‘better’ interculturalist. However, this is very much dependent on how courses are designed and delivered, and what educational materials are used. We therefore start this special issue with three papers which consider the development of different aspects of intercultural competence and interculturality, at different levels of the global education system. Ruest explores the potential of the model of Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters proposed by the Council of Europe (2014) for developing adolescent interculturalists in multicultural Canada; Parks investigates the relationship between language and cultural content in the curricula of different modern language programmes in UK and US universities; Moalla and Abid critique an English language textbook widely used with secondary school students in Tunisia, in order to evaluate its potential for developing the ‘good interculturalist’.

At the end of our last volume (LAIC, 19.6), we featured a paper from Melina Porto which set out her use of Autobiographies of Intercultural Encounters (Council of Europe, 2014) to explore the intercultural experiences of undergraduates in Argentina and UK engaged with historical documents relating to the controversial 1982 Malvinas war. In a neat point of synergy with the last issue, Carl Ruest reports on his experience in the North of the continent using the Autobiographies to explore the intercultural engagement between anglophone secondary students from British Columbia and francophone students from Quebec—on the opposite side of multicultural Canada—during mutual exchange visits. Through analysing his students’ work, Ruest evaluates the extent to which the components of Byram et al’s framework for intercultural competence are realised within the students’ accounts of their coast-to-coast intercultural encounters (Byram, 1997; after Byram, Barrett, Ipgrave, Jackson, & Méndez

García, 2009). Novelly, Ruest also explores the students' affective engagement with each other's 'culture' by considering their use of certain language in their autobiographies. Ruest concludes that the model of autobiography proposed by the Council of Europe (2014) was 'useful', but also gave rise to 'mixed results' amongst these adolescent interculturalists. Although for the most part, each student demonstrated positive feelings towards their interlocutor's culture at their particular stage of development, these adolescents demonstrated more of a 'passive' understanding of their interlocutor's culture relating to cultural information, rather than a more 'active' understanding which required a 'deeper and more personal engagement'. Ruest concludes by suggesting that while there are two versions—of the Council of Europe schema for autobiographies one for older learners and adults, and one for younger learners--the former may be too complicated for adolescents who may require their own version.

While over the years authors' papers published in the journal have engaged in extensive debate over the relative positioning of core concepts within intercultural communication, e.g., 'intercultural competence', 'criticality', 'interculturality', the implementation of these components within modern language degrees around the world still remains varied, and open to contestation. How these different aspects of intercultural competence are delivered to and absorbed by undergraduates has a profound impact on their capability to be 'good interculturalists'. Elinor Parks' paper comes as a welcome synthesis of a larger scale study which investigates both the impact of curricular structures on US and UK students' understanding of the relationship between language and culture, and on which aspects of the curriculum appear to best foster students' development of intercultural competence and criticality. However, this remains a 'chicken and egg' debate between theory and practice. For as the conference call suggests, even the grounds for what constitutes the 'good' interculturalist are being contested, if anything, more vigorously than ever: between advocates of skills-based models of competence which are amenable to assessment, such as those advocated by Barnett (1997) and Byram (1997); and those which advocate less normative notions of 'interculturality', for example, as a way of being (e.g. Simpson and Dervin, 2019a). At the other end of the equation, in terms of the implementation of these concepts as *praxis* in the university seminar and lecture hall, Parks' empirical data indicates that different curricular approaches appeared to be related to students' perceptions of the relationship between 'language' and 'culture'. That is to say, students who were taught the 'cultural' component of the programme in the foreign language (often German) appeared to value this, and perceive

culture and ‘language’ as inseparable; while, perhaps unsurprisingly, students who were taught the cultural component of the programme in their native language (usually English), viewed language as separate from ‘culture’, and were not aware of any deficiencies in this approach. What does emerge unambiguously from the study, however, is that the modules which set out cultural content did appear to be key to the development of the students’ criticality across all the programmes investigated.

We can still remember vividly the textbooks which we used at school, almost fifty years ago now, to both learn the default ‘modern language’ of the period, French; and for Malcolm, also ‘modern German’ and ‘classical Latin’. How uninspiring and ‘non-communicative’ our textbooks were back then! Although neither of us were to realise quite why until many years later. However good the teacher is, or however artfully the modern language curriculum is designed, much still rests on the quality of the materials which mediate between the teacher and students in the language classroom. In many, if not most, language classrooms around the world, these materials are still collated in certain textbooks which are universally used at different levels of schooling across state education systems. To address this, Moalla and Abid undertake an exploratory, critical study of one textbook widely used with third-year secondary school students in the under-reported North African country of Tunisia. Using the theoretical framework of ‘intercultural contacts’, their paper draws on both quantitative and qualitative analysis to uncover the potential of the texts and tasks within the textbook for developing the ‘good intercultural speaker’ (after Byram and Zarate, 1994). They found that – even after all these years – the number of ‘intercultural contacts’ which are available within this Tunisian school textbook appear to be very small indeed, and the design of those tasks which do seem to have some potential for developing some form of intercultural communicative competence appear restricted in their realisation of communicative potential. This paper suggests that, even after all these years, there remains much work to be done to ensure that the materials used in state schools imbue their students with the potential to become ‘good interculturalists’.

### *Ethical practice and the good interculturalist*

Experiencing and learning ‘other languages’ and ‘other cultures’ is perhaps conventionally seen as the kernel of interculturality; however, being a good interculturalist also has an ethical dimension, a dimension which is also regularly explored in the pages of this journal. In this way, ethically-minded interculturalists can also engage in a variety of personal practices such as prayer, meditation, and yoga, many of which have over time been transplanted from one

cultural context to another. The practice of ‘Eastern’ practices in the ‘West’ were memorably described by Shanta Nair-Venugopal in her (2012) collection of papers as the ‘gaze of the West’, which addressed ‘how the East ... perceives the ways in which the West ... represents, and reproduces or reconfigures, its material and transcendental cultural influences and other flows as impacts on civilization or as aspects of contemporary culture in discursive constructions about the East’ (p. 3). We conclude this short, selective issue with a paper particularly apposite to the making of the ‘good interculturalist’, which very much echoes Nair-Venugopal’s critique. Huang Zhuo Min draws on her own upbringing, imbued with ‘Chinese philosophies, cultures and languages’, to continue her interrogation of mindfulness as intercultural practice (see also Huang, Fay & White, 2017), with a particular eye on intercultural ethics. In this paper Huang carefully draws out the distinction between what she refers to in terms of its Buddhist origins as the ‘right’ ground of mindfulness, as originally practised in the ‘Orient’, and what she terms (after Purser and Loy, 2013) ‘McMindfulness’ – a term which refers to the form of mindfulness which has been appropriated by ‘Western’ practitioners of psychotherapy and ‘well-being’. On this argument, the latter appropriation of mindfulness loses its ethical compass through being put to more utilitarian purposes such as the maintenance of productivity and ‘well-being’, whereby the original ‘right’ ground of Buddhist practices are lost. Huang concludes her paper with a call for ethically grounded intercultural dialogue (after Phipps, 2013) and a deliberate engagement with the politicalised power hierarchies at play in what she calls ‘intercultural knowledge-work’.

### *Discord, harmony and critique*

Despite the perhaps slightly dark hint of possible ‘discord’ in the conference call at the top of this piece, the first two papers which address the theme of education and learning have reflected a certain coherence of paradigmatic orientation around the foundational work of Michael Byram and the Council of Europe (e.g. Byram, 1997; Byram et al, 2009; Byram and Zarate, 1994; Council of Europe, 2014). However, Fred Dervin, along with his colleagues, has lodged the critique that this view of what constitutes the ‘good’ interculturalist is itself a cultural construct; and that the version of intercultural communication enshrined in the EU policy documents very much reflects an extension of the Enlightenment project which is not necessarily commensurate with the ethical and political praxis of people everywhere (Simpson & Dervin, 2019a). Dervin and colleagues have also questioned what they allege is the ‘Eurocentrism’ of core notions in the conceptualisation of intercultural communication. In particular, certain prevalent models of intercultural competence have been critiqued for their

orientation towards the individual, which has been attributed to their origins in a distinctively European intellectual and philosophical tradition. This critique has extended also to the values upon which seemingly ‘normative’ aspects of intercultural competence are built, such as ‘respect’, ‘democracy’ and ‘tolerance’ (Simpson and Dervin 2019b).

In the event, however, a ‘discordant’ root-and-branch critique of what constitutes the ontology and axiology of the ‘good’ interculturalist and the current prevailing, and arguably normative, discourse of intercultural competence were not forthcoming for this special issue. However, this is not to say that our contributors have not offered useful critique within the terms of the paradigm within which they work, offering constructive ways forward for classroom teachers and policy makers alike. These include: Ruest’s proposals for a simplification of the Council of Europe’s Autobiographies for adolescent interculturalists; Parks’ proposal for greater integration of language learning and cultural content within modern language programmes within the US, UK, and elsewhere; and Moalla and Abid’s plea for more, and better, examples of authentic ‘intercultural contact’ to feature in language learning textbooks in Tunisia, and around the world.

Altogether, the four papers offer trajectories that problematise notions of interculturality emanating from the centre (the global North), and highlight the need for more locally constructed theories, pedagogies, and materials. In this sense, while Fred was unable to edit this special issue, we hope that we, as editors, and the authors presented here have begun a dialogue of what it means to be ‘a good interculturalist’ and have presented directions for pursuing that dialogue. Through this dialogue we may see expanded understandings of the good interculturalist, and especially global southern perspectives, much needed in the face of increasingly dominating and strident neoliberal and populist voices (perhaps voices that represent the antithesis of the good interculturalist). We welcome such research in future publications of our journal.

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